28 August 2001
English
Original: Spanish

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2001

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Guillermo E. **Kendall** (Argentina)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

B. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities:

3. Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

Introduction and overview

1. The Division of Conference Services was established at Nairobi, effective 1 September 2000, as an organizational unit of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, operationally reporting to the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. A permanent interpretation service was created at Nairobi as of January 2001. Within the period under review, the Department, in cooperation with the United Nations Office at Nairobi, took a number of steps to strengthen the capacity and increase the utilization of the conference-servicing facilities at Nairobi. Subsequently, administrative instruction ST/AI/2001/6 was issued amending administrative instruction ST/AI/342, entitled "Guidelines for the preparation of host government agreements falling under General Assembly resolution 40/243". It defined the responsibility of the Department for servicing meetings globally using the available conference-servicing resources of United Nations Headquarters and the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in the most cost-effective manner.

2. At its 438th meeting, on 28 August 2001, the Committee on Conferences arranged a videoconference in which the Chief of Conference Services at Nairobi, the Chief of the Translation and Editorial Service and the Chief of the Interpretation

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and Meetings Section at Vienna, the Director of the Conference Services Division at Geneva and other relevant managers at the respective duty stations participated.

3. The Chief of Conference Services of the United Nations Office at Nairobi introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/56/133 and Corr.1). The report described the steps taken to establish a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi and projected the positive effect of the availability of such an important facility on the meetings activities of the Office to the end of the current biennium and beyond.

Discussion

4. Members of the Committee sought additional information as to how the creation of the permanent interpretation team at Nairobi had led to more productive intergovernmental consultations; what kinds of meetings were held without interpretation; the number of weeks per year during which the team would be assigned to meetings at Nairobi rather than at other duty stations; whether there was a perception that the conference facilities at Nairobi competed with those at Addis Ababa; the reasons for the persisting high vacancy rates in the English and Arabic booths at Nairobi; whether the overall allocation of interpreter posts was sufficient, given the expectations of increased demand; why a number of important meetings of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) were scheduled to be held outside Nairobi in the second half of 2001; and whether consideration had been given to holding the next meeting of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at Nairobi.

5. Replying to the questions raised, the Chief of Conference Services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi said that prior to the establishment of the permanent interpretation team, it had been difficult for non-English-speaking missions in Nairobi to have full input into discussions of important documents prepared in English; since May 2001, multilingual interpretation had been provided to the committee of permanent representatives at that duty station. Meetings held without interpretation were technical consultations without diplomatic representatives. The increase in the number of non-calendar meetings reflected a trend towards the utilization of interpretation services for meetings of subsidiary bodies of UNEP and other agencies based at Nairobi, as well as new reporting requirements. While priority in interpreter assignments would continue to be given to United Nations meetings in Nairobi, the sharing of interpreter resources with other duty stations was consistent with the recommendation contained in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003. Nairobi's new potential was not expected to be detrimental to the operation of the conference facilities at Addis Ababa, since the Economic Commission for Africa does not have its own interpretation team and there is no significant overlap in their clientele. The 100 per cent vacancy rates for English and Arabic interpreters stemmed from the fact that the competitive examinations in those languages had not yielded a sufficient roster of candidates to be considered for recruitment. Efforts were being made to convince some of the successful candidates to accept an initial appointment to Nairobi. The allocation of posts was adequate, and it was hoped that a full team of 20 interpreters would be working in all six languages by the end of the year. The headquarters rule had been repeatedly brought to the attention of permanent representatives.

Conclusions and recommendations

6. The Committee noted with satisfaction that the conference-servicing facility of Nairobi was becoming organizationally, functionally and budgetarily an integral part of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

7. The Committee noted with appreciation: (a) the statement contained in the report of the Secretary-General that the number of multilingual meetings to be held in Nairobi and with the Nairobi team's participation elsewhere in 2001 and 2002 was increasing; and (b) the cost-saving effect of the establishment of the Nairobi interpretation service for the regular budget in terms of temporary assistance.

8. The Committee looked forward to receiving further information on the utilization of the conference facilities at Nairobi.